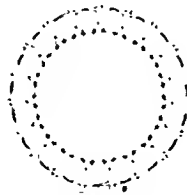




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**MAHATMA GANDHI
MEMORIAL LECTURE SERIES**

*Commemorating 125th Anniversary
of the birth of Gandhi*



1995
United Nations Year for Tolerance

GANDHI IN THE GLOBAL VILLAGE

INAUGURAL LECTURE

by

His Excellency Shri P. V. Narasimha Rao

PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

It gives me great pleasure to speak before this distinguished gathering about the life, work and vision of Mahatma Gandhi, the tallest Indian of the twentieth century, on this occasion when we commemorate his 125th birth anniversary here at UNESCO. Gandhi is one among a very select group of truly eminent world leaders in our century. The theme of this lecture series, 'Gandhi and the Global Village' which is completely appropriate to this conjuncture and this forum, leads me to reappraise the relevance of the Gandhian legacy to the people of India, and the relevance of the Mahatma's vision to the future of humanity.

Over and above the debate on Gandhian theory and practice in India, it is appropriate that UNESCO should celebrate the Mahatma's birth anniversary as an event of worldwide significance. Gandhi can well and truly be described as the greatest theorist and practitioner of non-violence and tolerance in our times. He also sought to awaken a novel moral consciousness in humankind. It is, therefore, natural that thinkers of sensitivity and distinction throughout the world should reflect upon what he said - and how he acted - in order to gain a fuller understanding of his discourse and its implications for the future, as humanity approaches a new millennium.

The founding Charter of UNESCO places upon it a profound responsibility in promoting creative interaction between different cultures and world-views, just as it also placed upon this Organization the responsibility of bringing the people of the world together in mutual understanding and in peaceful coexistence. The Constitution of UNESCO states that 'since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defence of peace must be constructed'. This is a sentiment entirely Gandhian in letter and spirit, since the violence and conflict in the minds of men and women, Gandhi believed, lay at the very roots of the anguish and discord of our times. For this very reason, once the minds of men and women are rid of violence and conflict, not only individuals and communities within Nations, but also Nations within the world community, could come together in creative endeavour to meet the great challenges that face them.

I am deeply conscious of the fact that we are meeting today in the beautiful city of Paris, which occupies so distinctive a place in philosophical reflection and in humanist thought in the contemporary world. I am, therefore, encouraged to raise some basic questions about the human condition. When we turn to the fundamental issues of our times: the questions of war and peace in the nuclear age; the problems of production and distribution in a post-modern era; and the globalization of economic and information systems, which have at once combined as well as segregated a variety of identities, then the need for discourses which address themselves to these questions and find imaginative answers to them becomes compelling. I believe that those engaged in reflection on these issues will profit greatly by examining Gandhian thought and action. The content and range of the ideas expressed by the Mahatma, no less than his translation of those ideas into practice, are indeed remarkable in many ways.

In any exploration of the seminal ideas generated by Mahatma Gandhi, and the courses of action he embarked upon, it would be profitable to recall the cultural milieu in which Gandhi was born in 1869, and the influences, Indian and Western, which shaped his mind as he reached

adulthood. Gandhi was a child in the State of Gujarat in western India, which State has looked across the waters of the Arabian Sea to West Asia, and to the European world beyond, since time immemorial. The Gandhi family was a family of status; the future Mahatma's father pursued the liberal vocation of civil service in a small principality.

The third quarter of the nineteenth century was an era in which India had been fully drawn into the imperial system of Great Britain. Not surprisingly, this integration affected her material and economic condition, no less than it affected her social and political condition, in a very disadvantageous fashion. Yet the colonial situation can best be understood as a situation of dialectical complexity; the subversion of the economy or the cultural fabric of India was accompanied by a certain measure of regeneration, in the spheres of social production as well as in the sphere of intellectual reflection.

While the epicentre of political and economic activity in colonial India, namely, the port-cities of Bombay, Madras and Calcutta, witnessed to the full the impact of colonial rule, the remote towns of Porbandar and Rajkot in Gujarat, where the young Gandhi grew up, were largely indigenous in content and texture. The cultural impact of the West was even more marginal. Indeed, the emotional and intellectual consciousness of young Gandhi, the notion of the sacred and the profane in his being, was largely shaped by the saints of devotional Hinduism. These saints wrote lyrical poetry of deep compassion and profound spiritual content which linked the sensibility of successive generations of Gujaratis for centuries. Gandhi's autobiographical writings reveal the special impact which one of these saints, Narasingh Mehta, made upon his consciousness. A composition by Mehta, even though its literary flavour is lost in translation, conveys the social and moral concerns central to that devotional theism. It says:

He is a *vaishnava* who identifies himself with others' sorrows

And in doing so has no pride about him

Such a one respects everyone and speaks ill of none ...

He labours neither under infatuation nor delusion ...

Narasaiyo says: His presence purifies his surroundings.

These and such values of devotional Hinduism were manifest directly in the Gandhi household through the intense religiosity of his mother, Putlibai. This created in the psyche of young Gandhi a sensitivity to matters of the spirit - indeed, a quality of existential immersion in religious concerns - which later blossomed into a powerful force behind the adult Gandhi's intervention in social, political and economic affairs. But the influence of saintly poets like Narasingh Mehta was by no means the only influence upon the Gandhi household. The commercial communities of western India, in pursuit of an eclecticism so characteristic of the Hindus were also deeply drawn to the metaphysical principles of Jainism. The Jain way of life rested upon a calculus of austere rationality, underpinned by a belief in the multifacetedness of truth, or *anekantavada*. Belief in this principle enabled a Jain to extend a sympathetic consideration to points of view other than his own. Indeed, this remarkable capacity of Jainism profoundly influenced Gandhi in his career as he led various movements in South Africa and in India.

Gandhi's journey as a young student to the great metropolis of London to pursue studies in law, brought him into the very heart of world culture. The initial shock experienced by the

young Gujarati in London was formidable. But it speaks volumes of his resilience, inner strength and self-confidence, that he was soon at ease in his new surroundings, combining the study of law with a widening of the mind through the exploration of Western culture. Here the influences of his childhood interacted with the new situation and enriched his intellectual and philosophical experience. Apart from the classics of Hindu and Buddhist literature, he also read some of the seminal Christian texts. Further, the social and economic consequences of industrialization made a tremendous impression on his sensitive mind; and probably played a vital role in shaping his attitude towards industrial societies as a whole. After completing his studies, Gandhiji returned to Gujarat, still committed to the notion of making his mark in life as a lawyer.

Yet Gandhi had barely returned to India, when legal business took him to Pretoria in 1893. South Africa, at this juncture, was a polity in which the first steps towards the construction of apartheid were being taken by a bigoted white community. The gross inequality to which coloured and black residents were subjected touched Gandhi to the quick, and apart from attending to legal business, he entered public life in order to combat racial discrimination.

The racial conflict in South Africa, in the last decade of the nineteenth century, exercised a profound influence upon Gandhi. On the one hand, he reached out to public activity in order to redress the situation. On the other, he set upon an interior journey of moral exploration which was destined to make his life a quest for self-realization, as well as an epic struggle against racial discrimination and political subjugation in Africa and Asia. Gandhiji later observed of his sojourn in South Africa: 'Here it was that the religious force within me became a living force. I had gone to South Africa ... for gaining my own livelihood. But ... I found myself in search of God and striving for self-realization'.

Gandhi's anguish at the state of South Africa prompted him to widen his religious and philosophical education through a critical reading of texts other than those of Hinduism and Jainism. He also reached out to figures like John Ruskin, the Christian Socialist; and Leo Tolstoy, the Russian novelist and philosopher, who sought to apply the principles of Christianity to the day-to-day problems of human existence. From Ruskin, Gandhi imbibed the value of the dignity of labour, manual or intellectual; and from Tolstoy he gained an understanding of how love and compassion could change humanity for the better. But although Gandhiji delved deep into the religious and philosophical literature of the West, this exploration largely brought out the original faiths ingrained in him. As an eminent scholar of classical India has put it, Gandhi's ideas were [I quote] fully in keeping with Indian tradition, and were probably developed from notions which he absorbed in his contact with the West ... His (Gandhi's) genius was even more successful than that of earlier reformers in harmonizing non-Indian ideas with the Hindu Dharma, and giving them a thoroughly Indian character; and he did this only by relating them to earlier doctrines or concepts. [End of quote] (From Prof. A.L. Basham).

The instinctive relationship which Gandhi sought to establish between social and moral action needs to be spelt out a little, at this juncture, because of the flood of illuminating light it throws upon his development as a political actor in South Africa; upon his epic role, slightly later, in the liberation of India; and upon the promise which Gandhian discourse holds out, for the possible resolution of the problems which haunt humanity towards the end of the twentieth century.

Despite assessments to the contrary, it seems reasonable to hold that the political actor in Gandhi was throughout his long career subordinate to the moral actor, since the Mahatma was

ultimately concerned with individual and collective salvation, rather than with purely mundane matters. The fires which raged within Gandhi can best be sensed in his own words [I quote]:

The politician in me has never dominated a single decision of mine, and if I seem to take part in politics, it is only because politics encircles us today like the coils of a snake from which one cannot get out, no matter how much one tries. I wish therefore to wrestle with the snake ... Quite selfishly, as I wish to live in peace in the midst of a bellowing storm howling around me, I have been experimenting with myself and my friends by introducing religion into politics. Let me explain what I mean by religion. It is not the Hindu religion ... but the religion ... which binds one indissolubly to the truth within and which ever purifies. [End of quote].

This creative synthesis, flowing from a fusion of the moral anguish of Gandhi with his social concerns as a political actor, is eloquently reflected in a novel and revolutionary mode of political action known to us as *satyagraha*, or soul-force, which he first crafted in South Africa.

The context in which *satyagraha* was developed as a political weapon needs to be highlighted. In 1906, the Government of Transvaal enacted legislation which required Indians to register themselves as residents, thus denying to them their natural rights as citizens of the British Empire. To protest against this 'Black Act', Gandhiji organized a meeting in Johannesburg. The Mahatma had contemplated the adoption of a resolution encouraging Indians in South Africa to resist discriminatory legislation. However, what was designed as conventional protest against an unjust law, acquired a unique significance when a participant declared 'in the name of God that he would never submit to that law and advised all present to do likewise'. In focusing upon the heightened moral import of the resolution, Gandhi pointed out that it had become something of the highest significance: 'Everyone must search his own heart and if the inner voice assures him that he has the requisite strength to carry him through, then only should he pledge himself and then only will his pledge bear fruit'.

Thus was born *satyagraha* as a weapon for fighting untruth and oppression in the world. As spelt out over time by Gandhi, there were distinctive features to the moral code of the true *satyagrahi*: he believed that truth could have more than one facet; he further assumed that the conscience of his adversary could be touched and transformed through non-violent protest; most important of all, he believed that no truthful contest ever yielded a victor and a vanquished; instead, the reconciliation which followed *satyagraha* brought the former adversaries together in a firm bond of friendship underpinned by their spiritual upliftment.

The potency of *satyagraha*, the novel instrument of political protest devised by Gandhi, was reflected in the substantial gains which he was able to secure for the Indian community in South Africa before he left for India in 1914. General J.C. Smuts, who negotiated a settlement with Gandhi was, therefore, delighted when he learnt of the Mahatma's departure for his homeland. 'The saint has left our shores', Smuts observed, 'I sincerely hope forever'. There was another sequel to the struggle against racial discrimination which Gandhi had waged in South Africa earlier in the century. The black community and its leaders too, remembered the power of non-violence; and despite the brutal authority characterized by the regime of apartheid, they ultimately triumphed over it through a non-violent yet militant struggle. When President Nelson Mandela visited Delhi in 1990, he referred to the Gandhian legacy in South Africa. 'We have since been influenced by his (i.e. Gandhi's) perception and tradition of non-violent struggle', he observed.

When Gandhi returned to India in 1914, after an interval of two decades, he noticed enormous changes in the political scene. By the second decade of the twentieth century, the middle classes in the subcontinent were fully drawn into a nationalist stance, ideologically and organizationally. Between the upper middle classes, on the one hand, and the relatively less well-off peasants, artisans and workers, on the other, stood a great gulf of wealth and consciousness which was difficult to bridge through the conventional mechanisms of modern politics. The colonial State had, in fact, exploited those who laboured in the fields and factories much more than it had exploited the middle classes. Yet the nationalism of the well-to-do was articulate and organized, while the nationalism of the poor and deprived lacked organization and modern ideology. Indeed, the poor could only voice their anguish through seemingly spontaneous and localized upsurges that were suppressed forthwith by the colonial State. In fact, even in the nineteenth century, there had been several small and big uprisings in the tribal areas against the exploitation by British-backed feudals. Some of them continued for many years, but eventually all of them collapsed under the weight of superior weapons and deeper intrigues to divide the tribals. So, in the beginning decades of the twentieth century, the question of the anguish of the deprived classes being linked to the aspirations of the middle classes in a purposeful and mass-based nationalism was the question to which no one could provide a ready answer.

When Gandhi addressed himself to the Indian situation in 1914, he chose as his base the *ashram*, or the spiritual retreat, as an institution ideally suited to the work he had in view. His dialogue with the middle classes, at this juncture, confirmed his view that these classes were united in the desire for liberation from colonial bondage. Within the span of a few years, he further discovered that the peasants, artisans and workers, too, saw the overthrow of British rule as an essential requirement of their material and spiritual welfare. Since it was difficult to reach these classes through the idiom of modern politics, liberal or radical, Gandhi took recourse to popular religious imagery as a potent means to rally the poor to the cause of nationalism and at the same time to heighten the level of their social consciousness. He deliberately built closer identification with the poor and down-trodden by adopting their half-naked clothing and hut-dwelling way of life. It was a genuine mingling of hearts and minds and had a lasting effect. In this process, he discovered an untapped reservoir of popular energy which he harnessed into nationwide agitations, based upon the principles of *satyagraha*.

The initial Gandhian experiments in *Satyagraha* in India were on a small scale. They aimed at resolving the grievances of specific groups of peasants and workers, at the same time as they expanded their political horizons. When World War I came to an end, in which the people of India had extended substantial support to Great Britain, Gandhi embarked upon a movement of *satyagraha* involving India as a whole. Indeed, in a span of three decades, Gandhi initiated a number of nationwide protests with two strategic purposes in view: first, to knit together the different social, linguistic and religious communities within India into modern nationhood; and secondly, to demonstrate to the British that their Empire over South Asia would have to be dismantled at the earliest.

The nationwide *satyagraha* campaigns waged by Gandhi within India rank among the biggest popular mobilizations in the history of humankind. I have already touched upon the moral content of *satyagraha* at its moment of birth in South Africa in 1906. When we relate *satyagraha* in South Africa to *satyagraha* in India, it would be appropriate to evoke the social dimensions of the latter. The population of India, at that juncture, was approximately 400 million. Roughly 75 per cent of this population living in the villages, was the constituency which Gandhi sought to draw into nationalist politics through *satyagrahi* action. To say that he fully succeeded in doing so would be untrue. However, the flag of nationalism was firmly

planted by Gandhi in every substantial village in India; and in every village of any size a dozen or more peasant households were actively drawn into the orbit of a struggle. The demographic scale of the nationalist movement was breathtaking, since it literally mobilized 10 per cent of the nation, that is, about 40 million persons, in non-violent action against the greatest imperial power of that period. In fact it succeeded splendidly because it was non-violent.

Perhaps the dextrous artistry of *satyagrahi* action and the ingenious manner in which symbolic action, backed by rudimentary organization, drew tens upon millions across the land into movements of resistance is poignantly captured by the Dandi March of 1930. The movement was directed against a tax on salt, which affected adversely even the poorest peasant household in India. To signify his disapproval of the tax on salt, Gandhi selected a small band of devoted followers, 79 in all, representing different sections of Indian society. The Mahatma and his *satyagrahis* marched from Ahmedabad, in Western India, to a village called Dandi, on the Arabian Sea. By traversing 241 miles in measured marches over the period of a few weeks, Gandhi and his gallant band of *satyagrahis* united a nation of 400 million against the British Empire.

The incredible economy of Gandhian action; the inverse relationship between the scale of *satyagraha* and the demographic momentum of popular arousal, illustrate the tactical genius of the Mahatma at the same time as they testify to the vast numbers of men and women who were drawn into political action. Indeed the cost-effectiveness of the 'Short March' - as I would like to describe the trek from Ahmedabad to Dandi - demonstrates the superiority of *satyagrahi* action over conventional modes of political protest, constitutional or violent. And the crowning feature of that action was, of course, that it was unarmed, non-violent and therefore repression and suppression-proof.

Despite the massive and countrywide dimensions of the movement, its absolute discipline and restraint were remarkable. Gandhi believed firmly in the purity of the means and in the immutable correspondence between ends and means. He suspended a countrywide *Satyagraha* movement abruptly on a single incident of violence committed by the people at a place called Chowri Chowra in the State of Uttar Pradesh. So widespread was the disappointment and so deep the genuine resentment on this suspension that even Jawaharlal Nehru expressed his serious reservation on the Mahatma's decision. But Gandhi stuck to his guns and asserted that the means adopted in any *Satyagraha* movement must invariably be non-violent. The movement was suspended but the message registered in the minds of the people indelibly.

The triumph of non-violent protest over racial discrimination in South Africa, or colonial domination in South Asia, does not exhaust the creative potential of *satyagraha* as an instrument of revolutionary action and social transformation. Indeed, in its depth and comprehensiveness, Gandhian thought and action reach out to life in all its rich diversity: to questions of social production and the distribution of wealth; to the nexus between the State, civil society and the citizen; to the manner in which the basic unit of society, namely the family, relates to the individual, on the one hand, and to the social order, on the other; and last but not least, to the character of the sacred and the profane as a guide to human beings in their journey across life to the worlds which lie beyond. The sheer range of Gandhian thought and practice, therefore, makes it one of the richest sources of reflection and guide to action today, across the decades which separate us from the vibrant and living truth of the Mahatma. Its only limitations are those inherent in the society and the State. But who, except God, is immune to limitations?

Any inquiry into the contemporary relevance of *satyagrahi* thought and practice should locate itself in Gandhi's understanding of non-violence, no less than in his understanding of social power as the basis of political action. The Mahatma repeatedly observed that non-violence, in his view, was the weapon of the strong rather than of the weak; just as it was also a weapon which drew victor and vanquished into a common association of reconciliation and moral regeneration. Gandhi's concept of power was of a piece with his understanding of non-violence. Not surprisingly, he looked askance at the power which grew out of the barrel of the gun, or rested upon the ephemeral calculus of wealth. For the Mahatma, the most legitimate form of power came through welding together popular aspirations and the life of truth into a movement of social transformation and moral upliftment. The struggles which he set in motion in South Africa, and later in India, were excellent examples of the aggregation of non-violent power and its use in the social and political domain for the good of the people.

What are the likely, possible and desirable arenas of *satyagrahi* action in our times? Since we are located in an age, when the complete annihilation of human civilization through weapons of mass destruction continues to be a possibility, it is relevant to ask whether the Mahatma's concept of conflict resolution has any role to play in relations between sovereign Nations as well as those between different sections within the States. At the risk of touching upon a theme which may appear parochial yet has a worldwide potential that needs to be explored, I would contend that the Gandhian sense of power profoundly influenced the foreign policy of India after independence in 1947. This policy, as is well known, sought to bring together the newly liberated nations of Asia, Africa and Latin America - with their common memory of domination - on a common platform to confer self-confidence upon polities which lacked the sinews of conventional strength in the post-World War II era.

As classically formulated, Non-Alignment probably assumes a different significance from the one it had in the third quarter of our century. But as a principle of equity and sanity, which enabled the developing nations to speak with a voice of dignity in the fora of the world, Non-Alignment is as relevant today as it was when it was enunciated. Although the Non-Aligned Movement took shape in 1962, the concept predates Indian independence. The principle was clearly enunciated in a resolution of the Working Committee of the Indian National Congress in 1946. Yet in relating Gandhian principles to the conduct of world affairs, I want to go beyond Non-Alignment, to touch upon the vital issue of nuclear disarmament in our times. Indeed, our deep commitment to Gandhian values, as a nation which looks up to the Mahatma as its most eminent citizen in the twentieth century, is eloquently reflected in the proposal which we initiated in 1988, for a phased and universal programme of nuclear disarmament. Rajiv Gandhi articulated this vision to rid the world of nuclear weapons at the Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly on Disarmament. As heirs to Mahatma Gandhi, we look upon our proposal for universal nuclear disarmament as Gandhian in spirit, just as we look upon it as a measure which can make the world a safer place for generations yet to come. Since UNESCO is dedicated to the promotion of world peace, I take this opportunity to reiterate the outline of this essentially Gandhian proposal for universal nuclear disarmament. I commend this proposal before these assembled men and women of scholarship in the conviction that they will so influence world opinion that the dream of universal nuclear disarmament will become a reality within a finite, stipulated time.

The question of nuclear disarmament is only one of the issues on the agenda of *satyagrahi* action in our times. No less significant are issues relating to the generation of wealth between and within nations in the world community; or questions pertaining to the articulation of local and regional identities within existing polities; and finally, to the vulnerability of the Nation-State itself, in the face of emerging supranational regional

organizations and changing technological and information systems. I shall touch upon these problems separately, with a view to locating them within the Gandhian discourse. I shall also try to draw from the Gandhian discourse, possible lines of solution to these problems.

Perhaps it would be appropriate to dwell upon the question of wealth generation and its distribution, in the first instance. There is a widespread yet erroneous belief, within India as well as outside India, that Gandhi lacked a full understanding of industrial societies; and that he may have been dismissive about the increasing pace and impact of industrialization in the twentieth century. Nothing could be farther from the truth. As a student of law in London, Gandhi explored industrialization in Great Britain intensively and set out his understanding of this phenomenon in a work called 'Hind Swaraj'. The Mahatma's quarrel was not with industrialization as such but with situations which reduced human beings to helpless instruments of technology in the name of development. This dehumanization was anathema to Gandhi, whether it emanated in the Capitalist system or the Communist system. I still remember how Gandhi was condemned in both camps, whatever may be the encomiums he is earning after he died. His trusteeship principle, namely that those who possess wealth must do so as trustees of the poor, was equally inconvenient to both camps and sounded very odd at the time, as it does even today *prima facie*. Yet I wish thinkers of today to go into this principle deeply. I have every hope that economic relations eventually will need to be redefined on the basis of a new meaning to be attached to the concepts of ownership and possession. The assertion that all land belongs to God is fully ingrained in Indian thought since time immemorial and Gandhi's principle derives from it.

These concerns were wedded to two additional concerns which had not been expressed by any of Gandhi's contemporaries, though they are forcefully articulated among 'green' activists today; namely, the baneful consequences of mindless consumerism, on the one hand; and the need for eco-friendly development, on the other. In his writings on social and economic questions, which are exploratory rather than definitive, Gandhi anticipates the notion of sustainable development at the same time as he expresses the need for devising systems of social production and environmental protection which are supportive rather than antagonistic towards each other. The views of the Mahatma on such issues, which are sustained by an acute sense of the practical and the desirable, constitute a rich source of insights about economic growth in developing and developed societies. He asserted, crisply, that in God's creation, there is enough for man's need but not for man's greed.

Gandhi's plea for sustainable development did not exhaust his concern for the processes of growth in modern society. Indeed, if only tangentially, he was deeply concerned with market and command systems as engines of increasing production in the modern world. That the market, if left to its own devices, becomes an obstruction rather than a stimulus to production, is one of the central arguments in Hind Swaraj, to which I have referred earlier. Yet the Mahatma was equally aware of the fact that command systems of social production, too, can throw up their own distinctive pathologies.

Since the genesis of Indian culture in classical antiquity, there exists in our collective consciousness a deeply lodged belief that in the social, no less than in the metaphysical domain, the 'middle path' is the most desirable of all paths. This notion was initially articulated by Gautama Buddha in the sixth century BC at the first flowering of our civilization. Men of politics no less than men of religion were deeply influenced by this notion over the centuries. In the years since 1947, the notion of the middle path was one of the central principles behind official policies - particularly policies of economic growth. Very recently, the notion of the 'middle path' has been reiterated in respect of initiatives connected with economic growth.

What sustains this remarkable continuity is probably the epic scale of Indian society and the culturally plural cluster of communities which constitute its social body.

The notion of the middle path as a sensible means to economic growth is powerfully endorsed in the writings of the Mahatma on social and economic questions, though these writings are tentative and exploratory. And its legitimacy goes even deeper in the Indian past. Here is a fertile field for intellectual inquiry by those engaged in reflection on economic issues, no less than for those engaged in social action, in different parts of the world.

Last but not least, I would like to speak of the great political disquiet of our times, as it stems from the crisis of identities, particularly local and regional identities, within the system of Nation-States. Gandhi was very alive to issues of identity, partly because of the plural character of the Indian society and partly also because the creation of modern nationhood in India, in the place of an older civilizational bond, meant the generation of an entirely novel overarching identity. The *satyagrahi* in Mahatma Gandhi handled this task with a sensitivity and skill rare in the history of social and political movements in our times.

What were the factors behind Gandhi's conspicuous success in mobilizing different social groups in support of the struggle for nationhood in India? Further, to what extent are these factors relevant to the handling of issues of local and regional identities within nations in the world today? There can be no easy answers to these questions, since the problem is one of tremendous complexity. However, the manner in which Gandhi conceptualized the role of the citizen in the modern State; and the manner also in which he actually drew the citizen into social and political activity provides clues to the reasons behind his success. At the very outset, he did not look upon the individual and society as being in the political domain. Instead, he sought to reach out to the individual-in-society as the basis of social action: as he relied upon his spoken words as a political actor of high moral integrity, they rippled across the fabric of society, to provide the basis of social unity on a truly monumental scale.

In the very nature of things, whether it was in South Africa in 1906, or subcontinental India in 1930, mass action could only be concerted through *satyagrahi* action and through the voluntary association of individuals, whose hearts and minds had been touched and transformed, in great movements of collective endeavour. Gandhi believed in action and asserted that an ounce of action was better than a ton of barren ideas. Of course, by action he meant the action of a *Satyagrahi*.

There are, of course, no blueprints which can provide an infallible design for individual action or for organized protest by entire communities. However, we have in Gandhian discourse the sensitivity to understand the anguish of wronged individuals or communities; just as we also have in Gandhian discourse the compassionate statecraft which through moral mediation can help resolve some of the problems that affect the contemporary world.

How, then, can we sum up the thought and practice of Mahatma Gandhi, a truly epochal figure, whose capacity for social intervention and moral praxis is reflected as much in the diverse arenas where he acted in his lifetime, as it is reflected in the relevance of his discourse to the resolution of a wide spectrum of problems long after his martyrdom in 1948? That Gandhi was a remarkable individual who developed, existentially rather than systematically, a moral code and a novel calculus of social protest is readily conceded by those engaged in reflection no less than those engaged in action in our times. Indeed, the Mahatma has made a distinctive innovation of morally oriented political action in the twentieth century.

No less momentous is the fact that four decades and more after his death, the ideas which Mahatma Gandhi placed before India and the world are being acknowledged as capable of finding solutions to some of the most pressing issues faced by humankind, as we move towards a new era in which wealth generation, political organization, social ordering and spiritual creativity are undergoing a revolutionary transformation. Seen from that perspective, Gandhi stands out as one of the towering figures of our century. Indeed, if the stature of men and women is to be measured by the fact that their ideas attain increasing validity and momentum as time passes farther and farther beyond their own life, Gandhi stands in lonely eminence in the twentieth century. Perhaps generations to come will turn to him increasingly as they wrestle with the problems of existence in an era which holds out a potential of unprecedented moral and material creativity through individual and collective human endeavour.

Thank you.